Folk Tales

A SHORT ANTHOLOGY

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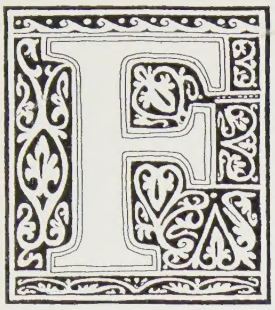

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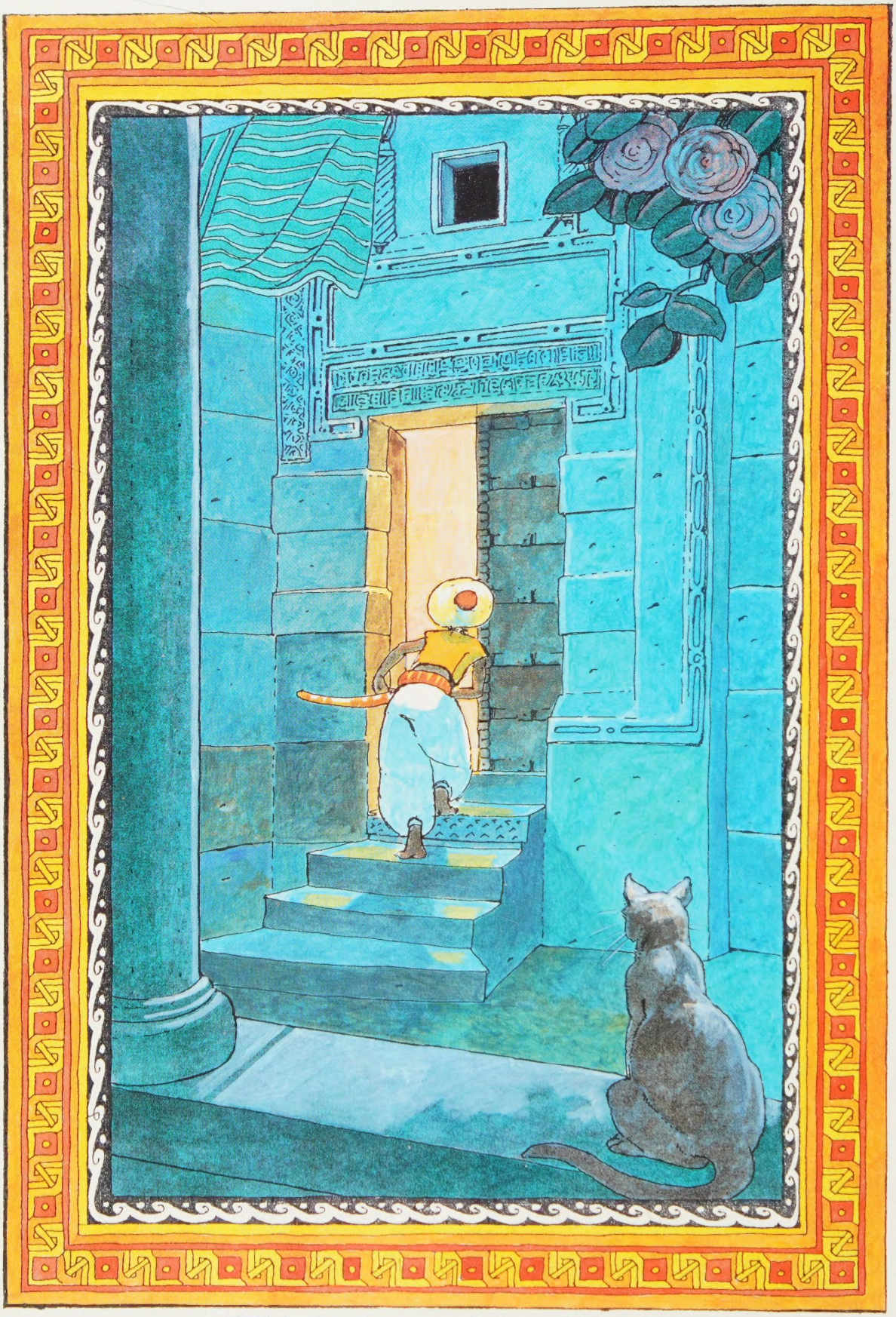

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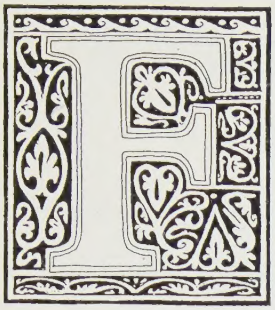

olk Tales

A SHORT ANTHOLOGY

Retold by Jane O'Loughlin

Illustrated by David Kennett

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Introduction

ONG ago, before the time of books, people enjoyed telling tales. In every country such tales have been handed down over hundreds of years. No one knows who made them up or how long they have existed. They belong to everyone; from people in cities, to people in villages and on farms. They are tales of the people — the folk tales.

In this anthology five types of folk tale are told. Each tale comes from a different part of the world, but often the same folk tale can be found in different countries.

The Silent Couple is a tale of simpletons. Such folk tales tell of people whose foolish deeds get them into trouble. Forms of this tale can be found in Turkey, Sri Lanka, Italy, Kashmir, Arabia, and Sicily. The Scots made

it into a ballad called 'The Barring of the Door.'

The Fisherman's Daughter is a 'trickster' tale, that relies on a clever woman's wise answers to outwit a nobleman. It is a South American folk tale but is also told in many parts of central Europe.

Hedda and the Ogre is a 'beast' tale. Beast tales involve giants, ogres, monsters or beasts and they are found in most cultures. This tale comes from Scandanavia.

The Coyote as a Shepherd is an Hispanic 'pourqoi' tale. Pourqoi tales explain an aspect of nature. This tale, which explains the nature of the coyote, comes from North America but forms of it are found in Europe.

The Three Hunters is a 'tall' tale. Tall tales are funny because they are nonsense. This tale comes from France.

Hedda and the Ogre

NE day while Hedda was tending her goats, she saw a terrible ogre coming over the hill. He looked at her and imagined what a delicious feast she would make.

"What can I do?" Hedda thought quickly. "All I have with me is an egg and a lump of salt for my lunch."

Then she had an idea. She knew that ogres always liked to show off their strength.

"Ogre," she said, "I have heard you are so strong that you can squeeze water out of stone."

"Of course I can!" roared the ogre. "You're only a weak human! You could never do it!"

As the ogre bragged, Hedda delved into her pocket and hid the egg in one hand.

Taking out the 'stone' she squeezed gently. There was a cracking sound as the egg-shell broke.

"That wasn't so hard," said Hedda. The ogre watched in amazement as the egg-white dripped onto the ground below. His face turned red as he squeezed a stone in vain.

"Can you crumble a pebble to powder?" Hedda asked.

"Of course I can," boasted the ogre, who took a pebble and squeezed. This time his face turned purple as he huffed and puffed. Still the pebble would not crumble.

"Oh, give it to me," said Hedda, taking the pebble in the hand with the lump of salt. She clenched her fist and the salt sprinkled to the ground. The ogre began to feel very uncomfortable. He would have to get rid of this small girl.

"We will have another test tomorrow," he said, "and then I'll win."

The sun was beginning to set, so they decided to rest. Using sheepskins as blankets, they settled down to sleep. Hedda did not trust the ogre so she placed some rocks under her sheepskin and hid behind a tree to see what would happen.

Just before sunrise the ogre awoke.

"Now is my chance to get rid of her," he thought and, taking a huge boulder, threw it down onto Hedda's bed with a mighty crash. He chuckled to himself and returned once more to sleep.

Suddenly, he heard Hedda calling out.

"Oh bother, how can I sleep when there is an insect buzzing around my head?"

The ogre could not believe his ears.

"She must be the strongest person in

the world to feel the shattering blow of a boulder as no more than the beating wings of an insect. I must escape before she decides to crush me like the pebble."

So the ogre took to his heels and fled. Hedda crept out of her hiding place and set off home to tell her tale.

The Fisherman's Daughter

HERE was once a wealthy nobleman who had many tenants living on his lands. One day he called three of them together; a farmer, a merchant and a fisherman.

"I am going to ask you three questions and those who answer correctly will not have to pay rent for ten years," he said. "Which is the swiftest thing in the world? Which is the fattest? Which is the sweetest?" The nobleman told them to return in three days with their answers.

The farmer and the merchant left together. On their way home they decided the best way to win the challenge was to give answers that flattered the nobleman. They would say:

'The swiftest thing in the world is the nobleman's horse, the fattest is the noble-

man's pig and the sweetest is the honey from his hives.'

The fisherman did not think as fast. Try as he might, no answers came into his head. That evening his daughter noticed that her father seemed very worried.

"What is bothering you?" she asked, and he told her about the nobleman's strange request. "Do not worry," she said. "The questions are easy." So she told him the answers.

After three days the men returned to the nobleman's house. Confidently, the farmer and the merchant gave their answers, sure that they would win the prize. To their surprise he saw through their flattery and declared them wrong.

Next the fisherman stepped forward nervously.

"The swiftest is thought," he said, "for it can travel any distance in the wink of an eye; the fattest is the earth, for out of it comes all the good things of the world; and the sweetest is sleep, for what is sweeter to a tired and troubled person?"

The nobleman was most impressed.

"You win," he said. "But tell me, how did you find such clever answers?" As he was an honest man, the fisherman confessed that his daughter had helped.

"Your daughter!" exclaimed the nobleman. "I would like to meet a such a clever woman. Tell her she must come to me in three days' time, neither riding nor walking, neither dressed nor naked, and bearing a gift that is not a gift."

The puzzled fisherman hurried home. Upon hearing the nobleman's request, the

daughter asked her father to fetch a fishing net, a goat and a pair of pigeons. Her father did as she had asked.

The day came when the fisherman's daughter was due to go to the nobleman's house. First she undressed and wound the fishing net around her body. Next she climbed onto the goat's back but allowed her feet to drag along the ground. Finally, she carried the pigeons in her hands.

In this way she arrived at the nobleman's home. He watched her approach and saw that she was neither naked nor dressed and came neither riding nor walking.

When she stood before him, she stretched out her hands saying, "I bring you a gift that is not a gift." Then she released the pigeons, which flew away.

The nobleman was so overwhelmed that

he wanted to make her his wife.

"I would like to marry you," he said. "However you must promise never to interfere in my affairs." The girl agreed and they were married.

Time passed and they lived happily, until one day the wife heard a peasant weeping.

"Why do you cry?" she asked.

"I share a stable with my neighbour," answered the peasant. "He keeps a cart there and I keep a donkey. Last night my donkey gave birth under his cart and now he insists the young donkey is his. I took the matter to the nobleman, but he agreed with my neighbour. So I lost the young donkey."

The wife felt sorry for the peasant and gave him some advice.

"Take a fishing rod and sit outside my husband's window. Nearby you will see a

mound of sand. Pretend you are catching fish. My husband will be so curious he will ask you what you are doing and your answer should be: 'If a cart can give birth to a foal then I can catch fish in sand'."

The peasant did as he was told and all happened as she had said.

"Your answer is very clever!" the nobleman said. "Did you think of it on your own?" The peasant admitted the nobleman's wife had assisted him. The nobleman became very angry and stormed to his wife's room.

"I don't want a wife who can't keep her promise and stay out of my affairs!" he raged. "Return to your father's house. Take only your most precious possession with you."

"Very well," his wife replied, "I will leave after dinner." That evening she waited until her husband had fallen into a deep sleep.

Then she ordered her servants to carry him to her father's house. In the morning when he awoke, her husband stared in surprise.

"How did I get here?" he asked.

"You told me I could take my most precious possession with me. So I looked at all I had and could find nothing more precious than you."

The nobleman finally realized he was fortunate to have such an intelligent partner and asked her to return home with him to run their lands together, fairly and wisely.

The Silent Couple

NE winter's evening, a recently married couple was sitting by the fire, admiring their new home.

"Dear husband," said the young bride, "the front door is open. Would you please go and shut it?" Her husband looked up in surprise.

"Do you expect me to wait on you?" he grumbled. "I am not a servant! Shut it yourself."

"I certainly will not," replied the bride angrily. "Why should I go out into the cold and draughty hall? I might catch a chill!"

They both sat glaring for a moment or two. Then the wife suggested, "Let's agree that whoever speaks first must shut the door." Her husband agreed and they settled back with their lips firmly clenched.

Now it so happened that a group of thieves, passing by, noticed the open door and crept into the silent house. The bridal couple heard them enter but each left it to the other to do something.

The robbers moved through each room loading their arms with the precious wedding gifts. When they came to the sitting room the foolish couple sat still so stubbornly that the thieves mistook them for wax dummies. The thieves stole the groom's suit and the bride's fine dress. After pocketing all the jewels, they departed, leaving the newly-weds sitting in their underwear.

In the early hours of the morning, a passing policeman saw the open door.

"This looks suspicious," he thought and went inside to investigate. As he moved through the empty rooms he realized a

robbery had taken place. When he came upon the newly-weds sitting in their underwear as if in a trance, he was very puzzled.

"What has happened here?" he asked. When the silent couple refused to answer, he became angry. Eventually, losing his temper, he shouted, "I arrest you for theft and shall take you to jail immediately." The policeman took out his handcuffs and moved toward the husband but the young wife could restrain herself no longer.

"Stop! We are innocent!" she cried out.

Immediately the foolish husband jumped up, shouting, "I won!"

The Coyote as a Shepherd

HERE was once a woman who set out to hire a shepherd for her flock. First she met a bear.

"Do you know anyone who could look after my flock?" she asked.

"Will you hire me?" suggested the bear.

"Yes, if you know how to call sheep," she replied.

"Grrr!" growled the bear.

"No, you would scare them away," said the woman. Further on she met a puma.

"Do you know anyone who could look after my flock?" she asked.

"Won't you hire me?" suggested the puma.

"Certainly, if you know how to call sheep," she said.

"Raagh!" roared the puma.

"No, you're not what I want," said the

woman. She had not gone far when she met a coyote.

"Do you know anyone who could look after my flock?" she asked.

"Would you hire me?" asked the coyote.

"Yes, if you know how to call sheep," she replied.

The coyote raised its head and sang out in a clear, ringing voice. It was a beautiful sound and just what the woman wanted.

"You're just right," she said and hired the coyote immediately.

When the woman returned to the fields she could see no sheep.

"Where is my flock?" she asked.

"Their skulls are in the river and their bones are in the woods," replied the coyote.

And that is why, even today, coyotes are *never* hired as sheepdogs.

The Three Hunters

NE day while passing through the wood, I came upon an unusual sight. In front of me stood three hunters, each holding a gun. Two were not loaded and the other had an empty barrel.

"Let's go hunting," they cried. Intrigued, I decided to follow, to see where they would go. They went far into the wood. Even further than that.

Suddenly, three hares darted across their path. The hunters raised their empty guns and fired. Kapow! Kapow! Kapow!

Two shots missed completely and the other whizzed straight past the hares.

Hours later, after no time had passed, they came to a house that had neither walls, nor roof, nor windows, nor door. The hunters knocked on the door that was not there.

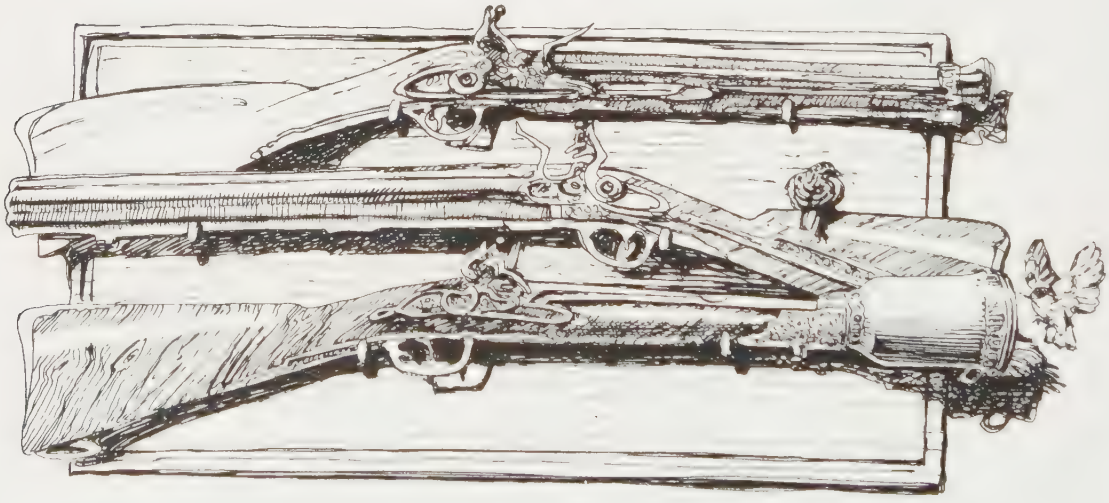
Knock! Knock! Knock!

A voice that could not be heard replied, "What do you want?"

They asked for a saucepan to cook the hares that had not been shot.

"We have three saucepans," the voice answered. "Two are cracked and the other is broken."

And there my story ends, for I was lost in the woods and never found.



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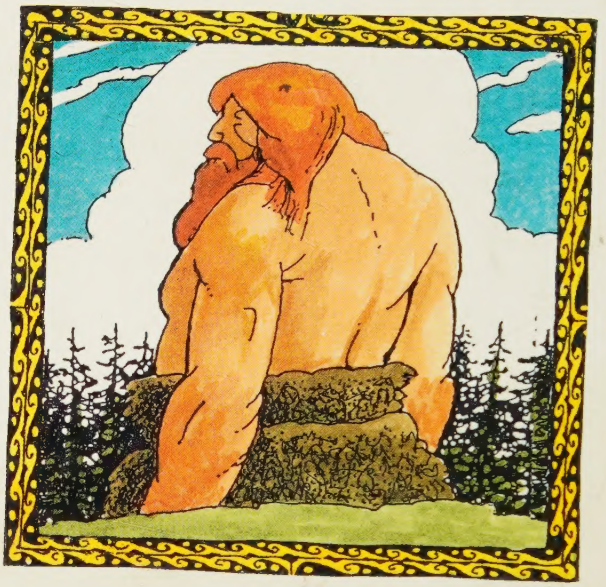

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